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WHAT IS OUR POSITION AS A CHURCH

An Address Delivered before the Seventh Synod of the Second District of the Moravian Church, held at Palmyra, New Jersey, October 16-18, 1906

BY THE
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This is a timely question for us to consider. Other denominations have settled it, and have placed themselves on record both by word and deed. Some of the leading bodies of evangelical Christendom, representing the safe conservatism, the highest Christian culture and intellectuality as well as the truest consecration, on the part of both ministry and laity have recently entered into the field of an aggressive evangelism with an enthusiasm and a success, which is little short of marvelous. Our Church as being the oldest Protestant denomination, and at the same time a recognized leader in Foreign Missionary work, which is simply evangelism abroad, ought also to place itself on record in these opportune times by an unmistakable attitude of the heartiest sympathy with, and a most earnest engagement in the great and imperative labor of soul-rescue.

I DEFINITION

What do we mean by evangelism? The preaching of the Gospel with the direct purpose and aim of the salvation of sinners.

Now this is without question *the Church's main business.* What is the Church for? Simply to deal with the problem of human salvation from the basis of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The first, constant, and last command of the Lord Jesus Christ was: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." Whatever else the church may do, it dare not neglect or slight this vital command of its Lord. *The Church must not only be the field for soul-culture, but also the force for soul-capture.* Everything in the work of the Church is, and ought to be, of less importance than evangelism, and should be subservient to, because dependent upon, it.

Dr. A. C. Dixon has well said that "Evangelism is to Christianity what the alphabet is to literature, and what the multiplication table is to mathematics; and a church that tries to do the work of Christ without evangelism is trying to make a literature without an alphabet, and a principia without a multiplication table."

Evangelism is the concerted, protracted effort on the part of the Church, that is, on the part of both ministry and membership, to save souls by the preaching of the Gospel. *Evangelism* is only a modern term for *a religious revival*, and this is, according to a good definition,—"*a time when God makes new Christians, and mends old ones.*"

Occasionally we hear people say: "I do not believe in such special efforts, called revivals." The answer is not far to seek: What if you do not; does your position of unbelief release you as a Christian from the Divine command and obligation to make the salvation of souls your great business? We are not under that kind of "do-as-you-please" government. Denial of a known duty does not exempt from the performance of it. We do not find a single instance where a subject of Divine government is freed from obligation and responsibility through his denial or unbelief of a positive command of God.

Evangelism is a passion for the Lord Jesus Christ, a passion for the Gospel of redemption, a passion for the salvation of men.

What, now, is the Position of our Church toward Evangelism?

II POSITION

I. Doctrinal

Ours is avowedly an evangelical denomination. Our theology is thoroughly true to God's Word. We take the unalterable stand on the foundation facts stated by Peter and the Apostles in Acts 5:30-32. "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, hanging Him on a tree. Him did

God exalt with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins. And we are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given them that obey him." We are absolutely loyal to Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, the Saviour of the world. General Synod after General Synod has made definite declaration of our doctrinal position in such language as this: "Our chief and central doctrines we unalterably hold to be the following,—Jesus Christ is the Propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world; and God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. This Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of Man, who was crucified and rose again, our Saviour and Redeemer, is our Church's costliest treasure."

Our "Brotherly Agreement,"—the platform upon which all the United Brethren's congregations are based, adds further certainty to the evangelical position of our Church. "The Brethren's Church, with all its congregations, is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets of which Jesus Christ is the chief Cornerstone. Their confession of faith is:—Christ is All, and in all; their mark, the high and heavenly calling of God in Christ Jesus, and their endeavor, to press towards the mark set before them, through faith in Christ, in the love of God, and in the hope of eternal life, by a steadfast adherence to the doctrine of Christ and His Apostles, by a faithful keeping of His commandments, and by undeviatingly following His footsteps."

At the laying of the corner stone of the Moravian Church at Lititz, Pa., on June 7, 1786, Bro. August Klingsohr, the pastor, said that the object of this building was, that Christ's atoning sacrifice might be proclaimed to the salvation of the hearers: while the fact that He has redeemed us by His Blood should constantly inspire us to sing to Him songs of

praises." When the church was dedicated on August 13, 1787, Bro. Klingsohr in his prayer asked that "this Church might stand no longer than the simple doctrines of the Cross of Jesus should be preached therein in their purity." These extracts from a speech and a prayer are cited as illustrations of the thoroughly evangelical position of our Church 119 years ago,—a position from which we of to-day have not swerved by a hair's breadth.

Take specimens of our hymnology as marking the doctrinal position of our Church. There is that hymn by Count Zinzendorf:—

"The Saviour's blood and righteousness,
My beauty is, my glorious dress;
Thus well arrayed I need not fear,
When in His presence I appear.

Therefore my Saviour's blood and death
Are here the substance of my faith:
And shall remain when I'm called hence,
My only hope and confidence."

Or that hymn by John Cennick, who was the compeer of any contemporaneous or modern evangelist:

"The doctrine of our dying Lord,
The faith He on Mount Calvary sealed,
We sign, asserting every word
Which in His Gospel is revealed
As truth divine; and cursed are they
Who add thereto or take away.

Christ is our Master, Lord and God,
The fullness of the three in one;
His life, death, righteousness, and blood,
Our faith's foundation are alone,
His Godhead and His death shall be
Our theme to all eternity.

On Him we'll venture all we have,
Our lives, our all, to Him we owe;
None else is able us to save,
None but the Saviour will we know;
This we subscribe with heart and hand,
Resolved through grace thereby to stand."

Our theology is evangelical through and through. Doctrinally we are right in line with a most aggressive evangelism. We believe that Christianity without the atoning, reconciling death of Jesus Christ is powerless to save. We believe the life and example of Christ without His death for sin cannot be other than a source of terror and dismay, instead of a comfort, hope, and inspiration to sinful, guilty, powerless humanity. We gladly re-echo St. Paul's words: "We are not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, because it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

Now, unless our theology is a mere dead orthodoxy, we are bound to be evangelistic, for as one might expect, the evangelical denominations alone are the evangelistic denominations. *An evangelical position looks to evangelistic effort.* To have the Gospel and yet not to give it with all the passion, perseverance, and power of which God by His Holy Spirit makes us capable, is to be guilty of a sin against God, and of a crime against our fellowmen. To be true to Jesus Christ and to our fellowmen, for whom He died,—to be consistent with our positive dectrinal declarations, we are under obligation to set evangelism in the place which the Master put it,—the first place in our program of aggressive work.

Sometimes we hear it said,—"Such revival services are not Moravian." If such a statement were true, which it is not, the objection would be entirely irrelevant; it could have no force whatever, because we are Christians before we are Moravians. We have to do with the commands of the Head

of the Church, Jesus Christ. Whether Moravian or not Moravian, evangelism is certainly Christian. But to say that such efforts are "not Moravian" is decidedly untrue to facts. Our Church has not stultified and condemned itself to such a degree as to hold an out-and-out evangelical position, and yet refuse the logical and consistent outcome of such a stand, namely, evangelistic effort. We cherish what we call "Moravian Peculiarities."—Memorial Days, Choir Covenant Days, Love-feasts, Hymns, Tunes and Litanies; but these "peculiarities" were among the direct consequences of the revival of 1727, and were made possible by it. The real Moravian peculiarity,—the mark of the genuine and true Moravian, is the possession of the old-time Moravian spirit,—a passion for the Lord Jesus Christ, and a passion for the salvation of souls.

2. Historical

Here again our position is in heartiest accord with aggressive evangelism. *Think of the history of special events.* Take the Memorial Days of August. It is needless to go into the details of what August 13th, August 17th and August 27th, stand for. Every intelligent Moravian knows that every one of those dates is a great spiritual landmark, which points back to the signal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a mighty impulse to evangelism on the part of our Church. The Brethren of 1727 arose from the baptism with the Holy Spirit, drenched and dripping with Pentecostal power, ready with heart, soul, and body to do the work of the Master in the winning of souls. It was Apostolic that men and women, endued with power from on high, should yearn to share their experience with others.

Some people are wont to say, that religious awakenings are *only spasmodic in their effects.* It is not so. Revivals are not abnormal, unnatural, illogical, artificial. They are in strict accord with God's law and order. Seasons of special spiritual impulse are natural and ought to be expected.

The history of the Church in both Old and New Testament times is an irrefutable proof of this. The New Testament Church was born in a revival. The world's religious progress to say nothing of its progress in every other department of activity, is simply a history of revivals. Every Christian denomination is the outcome of a great spiritual quickening, and our own Church is no exception to that rule.

We Moravians bless God for *the special spiritual "spasm" of 1727*, and gratefully remember that six years later, yes, nearly thirty times six years later, that "*spasm*" is still working, and showing itself in the undertaking of a Foreign Missionary evangelism, which has done more to keep our Church alive, humanly speaking, than anything else we have done.

Think also *of the history of persons*. The great leaders of the Renewed Brethren's Church in the early days were evidently rather evangelists than pastors. We need only to recall the labors of Count Zinzendorf and his co-workers. Their preaching in this country was constantly followed by an awakening. The accounts of the organization of the older congregations prove this. Not infrequently can we read in the old Church Diaries something like this: *Bro.—— preached at——. A number of souls were awakened and asked the Brethren to send them a pastor.*

Think of the mighty work of John Cennick, and others of the Brethren, who, though less conspicuous in their service, were owned and blessed of God in the salvation of many souls.

Speaking of the labors of our Brethren in the olden times, Bro. Paul de Schweinitz in a letter recently published in The Moravian, wherein he replies to a misconception of the Secretary of the Men's Movement in the United Presbyterian Church in regard to the Moravian Church, says: "They gladly preached the Gospel to the white settlers, and in fact

had centers of evangelistic activity in nine of the original thirteen colonies, but when clergymen of the Established Churches of Europe began to appear, with an ecclesiastical self-abnegation probably unparalleled, they quietly turned over these nuclei of churches to such clergymen. It is needless to say that such a policy was suicidal from the point of view of church extension." Think of such evangelistic zeal on the part of our Brethren, when two-thirds of the Colonies were the scenes of devoted labors for Christ. Surely it is not saying too much to declare that the one and only reason for maintaining a position of apathy or antipathy to, instead of earnest sympathy with and hearty engagement in aggressive evangelism, is lack of the spirit of Jesus Christ. Where there is the evangelistic heart, the special soul-saving effort will surely follow.

3 Practical

Now if anything is evident from the doctrinal position of the Moravian Church, if anything is the unmistakable verdict of past history, if anything is plain from the Divine leading in the affairs of our Church, it is that we shall engage in mission work.

Bro. W. H. Romig in his pamphlet entitled "The Moravian Church" says: "The answer that most people would give to the question, 'What is the distinguishing feature of the Mora- Church?' is that it is a missionary Church. It is the only church, whose membership in the foreign field greatly outnumbers the membership at home."

But Foreign Missions are simply and essentially evangelism abroad. To be true to our providential call, we ought to be leaders in a most aggressive evangelism at home. What right have we to devote more effort to the one than the other? What sanction do we find for making a distinction between Home and Foreign Missions? The two are Siamese twins, as it were, linked together by a living ligament of Divine life

and Divine command, and to cut them apart, or to neglect and starve one, is eventually to kill both.

Brethren, we ought by all means to expect and to find the same zeal, interest, and support of evangelism at home as abroad.

In view of our doctrinal, historical, and practical position as a Church, I submit that we are all untrue to the facts involved in the case, unless we enter heart and soul into most determined and aggressive campaigns for reaching and rescuing the unsaved in our churches and in our communities.

III ACTION

There is a ringing call to our Church along with all evangelical denominations to such evangelism today.

God is speaking to His Church distinctly, positively, and summoning her to give renewed heed and earnest care to the winning of souls. Christ asked of men quick to scan the skies for weather indications: "Can ye not discern the signs of the times?" No one who has kept an open eye, an open ear, and a receptive heart, can have failed to see and understand, that the Master is moving along evangelistic lines in these days. It is evident that God is now loudly calling upon the evangelical denominations, upon individual churches, upon each pastor, and upon each Christian man and woman to engage in the work of saving souls.

What ought we to do? To ask that question is to answer it. GET TO WORK. There is work for the *Ministry* Let "judgment begin at the house of God." The pastor is preeminently the soul-winner among his people. If there is to be action in evangelism, then the ministry must make itself ready. A revival in a church begins first in the preacher's own heart. When the pulpit is aflame, the pews are apt to catch fire.

Is it not true that a serious defect of our preaching is in that we do not look for or expect immediate conversions? Do we

not hold fast to the idea of casting our bread on the waters, to be gathered after many days? Such preaching may and must do for certain kinds of Christian enterprises, but it does not by any means fully meet the ideal and the requirements of the Gospel plan of preaching an immediate, a present salvation. How many of us preachers go into the pulpit with a definite desire and prayer that God will bless the message to the salvation of souls then and there? How many of us ever elaborate in our sermons a specific appeal to the unconverted to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord? And yet what else ought we to be preaching for? Paul said: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Is it any wonder that we hear the remark: "The people are losing their respect and their use for the Church, when the tendency of the pulpit is all toward literature, sociology, and ethics."

Let us cut out of our preaching so much of what is not to the point, and is foreign to our business as ambassadors for Christ, and get down to the real, solemn, serious work of our ministry, that of lifting up Jesus Christ as the one and only Saviour of sinners, and seek to persuade them to accept Him.

There is *work also for the membership or our churches.*

Some one said: "The reason why we do not have revivals in our churches is because the laity does not want them!" This statement is only too true in many cases. A pastor arose before his congregation and said: "I want you who are anxious to have a revival, and are willing to pray for it, and work in it, to stand up." Certainly he did not ask too much of men and women who professed to love and serve Christ. But not one in the congregation arose, and the pastor was convinced that his people were indifferent at least to evangelistic work.

Rev. W. J. Dawson remarked truthfully that "the church is apt to become more of a social club than a propagandist center." "We have," he continued, "plenty of force in our churches for the Christian conquest of our great cities, but we have failed to mobilize our forces. No man can keep his own soul alive who is not trying to save other souls, and no church that is not passionately trying to win the world that is without, is truly alive. The loss of evangelistic spirit means ruin."

Bishop Brooks once declared: "It is terrible for a rich man to go through life, and never to have helped a poor man out of his plenty; but it is far more terrible for a Christian to die without having brought any other soul to Christ."

The editorial in the Sunday School Times for January 27, 1906 on "The Art of Taking Men Alive," begins by saying: "It is well for every confessed follower of Christ to face two facts, and to face them squarely: First, that unless he is personally seeking to win individuals to Christ, there is sin in his life. Second, that the winning of individuals to Christ is an art, and is the most difficult art in the world."

Well did Bishop Huntingdon say: "Indolence is the worst enemy that the church has to encounter. Men sleep around her altars, stretching themselves on beds of ease, or sit idly with folded hands, looking lazily out in the fields white for harvest, but where no sickle rings against the wheat."

Ofttimes we are too deeply engaged in other Christian work, in benevolent, philanthropic enterprises, in reform movements, in good citizenship plans, in educational endeavors, or in musical fetes, and forget the main purpose of our discipleship, service in seeking to convert the sinner from the error of his ways, and to save him from death. Would that the men and women of our beloved Church might catch the spirit of Nehemiah, that pious, practical, persevering, prayerful, loyal

layman, and say in reference to personal evangelism in their own church and in their community: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

We are told that the reason why our Church is so small today is to be found in the "mistaken policy" of our forefathers a hundred and more years ago, in insisting upon "unreasonable requirements for church membership," and in not seizing upon the splendid opportunities of church extension in the New World. We may at times have felt like condemning what now appears to us as indeed a narrow and contractive policy of our Church years ago, when we behold other denominations reaping the fields which the Brethren had so laboriously sown; but let us not be too severely critical of our predecessors, who lived, loved, and served the Lord Jesus Christ before us. They were true to their conception of the peculiar mission of the Moravian Church, to evangelize the world, rather than to organize churches. But let us to see to it that we do not fall into and maintain a "mistaken policy" in our days, when God is summoning His Church to a campaign of aggressive evangelism.

We look back upon the days of 1727 with pride, and with longing. Yearly there goes up from many a loyal Moravian heart the prayer: "Wilt thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?" "Renew our days as of old." It is many a long year since we as a Church have had a general spiritual awakening. Why have we not had repetitions of those great and glorious revival times?

We need nothing more than a genuine, widespread awakening to evangelism in our Church. If we fail to have it, our loss will be the heaviest blow that we can suffer. If we pray for, and work for, and get that revival, all the vexing and perplexing problems will disappear and vanish in the thin air, like the morning mist before the rising sun. Who can doubt it? Hear the word of God: "If my people, which are called

by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." 2 Chron. 7 : 14.

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